How to Knit for Beginners

Easy Knitting Instructions to Help you Learn to Knit

from the knitting daily Experts

Dear Beginning Knitter,

So you've decided you want to learn how to knit! Congratulations; I think you've made a great choice.

Knitting is a centuries-old craft, mostly practiced out of necessity; if you wanted socks or a sweater, you had to knit it yourself.

Today knitting is much more of a hobby, although I think it's an art form, and some might say it becomes an obsession!

When a new knitter looks at all of the yarn and patterns out there, it can seem overwhelming. But don't let it get to you—even the most accomplished knitter was once a beginner.

It might surprise you to know that there are only two stitches used to make any knitted object: the knit stitch and the purl stitch.

The knit stitch is a versatile stitch that is one of the building blocks for all knitted items. When you knit every row, you're actually knitting a stitch pattern called "garter stitch." It's called that because of the inherent lengthwise elasticity that made bands of garter stitch good at keeping stockings up.

When you add the purl stitch, your knitting options open up even more! Knitting one row and then purling the next row creates the imminently versatile stockinette stitch, used in so many knitting patterns.

We're going to go through the process of knitting the knit stitch and the purl stitch step by step, and we'll also cover things you need to know before you start knitting, and several important techniques (such as how to start your knitting and how to end it!).

At the end of this eBook, you'll find a pattern for a garter stitch wash cloth, a garter stitch scarf, and a ribbed scarf. You'll be able to knit all three of these patterns after a bit of practice swatching!

Here's to knitting!

Kathleen

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Before You Start

As with any craft, there are some basic supplies you'll want to have on hand. These include:

- Yarn, wound into a ball if it didn't come that way
- Needles appropriate to your yarn size
- Measuring tape to measure your progress
- Crochet hook for fixing mistakes
- Pen and paper for making notes
- And a bag to keep everything in!

Yarn

Yarn is your raw material. As you get more into knitting you'll see the wide range of fiber types that are spun into yarn. There's workhorse wool and luscious llama and everything in between!

There are seven basic yarn weights, which essentially tell you how thin or thick a yarn is. The chart below from the Craft Yarn Council Association details what these weights are and what they mean.

CYCA Standard Yarn Weight System
Categories of yarn, gauge ranges, and recommended needle sizes

Yarn Weight Symbol & Category Names	0 LACE	1 SUPER FINE	2 FINE	3 LIGHT	4 MEDIUM	5 BULKY	6 SUPER BULKY
Type of Yarns in Category	Fingering	Sock, Fingering, Baby	Sport, Baby	DK, Light Worsted	Worsted, Afghan, Aran	Chunky, Craft, Rug	Bulky, Roving
Knit Gauge Range* in Stockinette Stitch to 4 Inches	33–40** sts	27–32 sts	23–26 sts	21–24 sts	16–20 sts	12–15 sts	6–11 sts
Recommended Needle in Metric Size Range	1.5–2.25 mm	2.25–3.25 mm	3.2–3.75 mm	3.75–4.5 mm	4.5–5.5 mm	5.5–8 mm	8 mm and larger
Recommended Needle U.S. Size Range	000 to 1	1 to 3	3 to 5	5 to 7	7 to 9	9 to 11	11 and larger

* GUIDELINES ONLY: The above reflect the most commonly used gauges and needle sizes for specific yarn categories.
** Laceweight yarns are usually knitted on larger needles to create lacy, openwork patterns. Accordingly, a gauge range is difficult to determine. Always follow the gauge stated in your pattern.
See more at www.craftyarncouncil.com/weight.html.

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In my beginning knitting classes, I always use a Medium (#4) yarn with size 8 or 9 needles, depending on how thick the yarn is (8s with worsted weight, 9s with Aran weight). It's also a good idea to use a light colored yarn so you can see your stitches.

Yarn Labels

There is a wealth of information on yarn labels. Take a close look at a label and you should see the fiber content, the recommended needle size, washing instructions, and gauge information (for more on gauge see "Gauge" below).

As you become a more experienced knitter you'll learn how to interpret the information on a yarn label to help you decide what to use a specific yarn for.

For the purposes of this eBook, find yourself a yarn that knits up at 4.5 to 5 stitches per inch on size 8 or 9 needles.

Yarn Label

Needles

If you've been to a yarn shop or craft store, you've noticed all the different types of needles available. There are wooden needles and metal needles made from all kinds of different wood and all kinds of different metal!

You've probably also noticed that there are straight needles (two separate needles) and circular needles, which aren't actually circular, they're made up of two needle tips connected by a cable. Circular needles are use to knit items that are circular or they're used to knit items that are very wide, such as afghans or baby blankets.

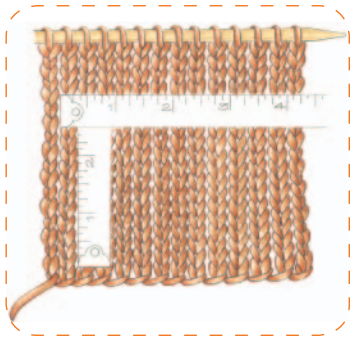
As you progress in knitting and try out different types of needles, you'll discover which type you like best and which needles work for different types of yarn.

For this tutorial I recommend a set of straight bamboo needles. The bamboo grips the yarn a little bit so your stitches won't slide around too much.

Gauge

In knitting, gauge is a measurement of your knitting that is a critical factor in getting and accurate fit. All patterns are based on a specific number of stitches and rows per inch of knitting. If your knitting doesn't match that specification, chances are good that your garment won't fit properly.

You "get gauge" by knitting a swatch, which is a 4- by 4-inch square piece of knitting. The pattern tells you the number of stitches and rows you need to get that 4"X 4" square, and you change needle sizes if you're not getting gauge.



To measure the gauge, lay the swatch flat, place a tape measure or ruler parallel to a row of stitches, and count the number of stitches are in 4 inches. This is your stitch gauge per 4 inches. Compare this gauge to the one specified in the pattern.

If your swatch is too loose (fewer stitches than called for) you need to go down a needle size. If your swatch is too tight (more stitches than called for) you need to go up a needle size.

For the patterns at the end of this eBook, gauge is not crucial, but it's still provided as a guideline.

This swatch shows how much needle size can change the size (gauge) of your knitting. This is knit from the same yarn, going up a needle size with each color change.

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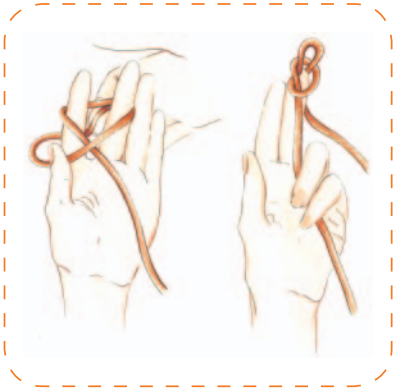
Casting On

"Casting on" is the name for the technique used to get the first row of stitches on the needle. There are several methods of casting on, but the one that we're going to learn here is called the "long-tail cast-on." It's a versatile and sturdy cast-on that you can use for most projects.

Making a Slipknot

This cast-on starts with a slip knot, which is a knot that tightens up easily once you place it on the needle.

1. With the tail end of the yarn in your palm, wrap the working yarn around your index and middle fingers, and lay the working yarn across the tail end, forming an X.
2. Spread your fingers slightly and push the working yarn through your fingers from the back of your hand.
3. Pull this loop up slightly while holding the tail end of the yarn to form a knot.
4. Place the loop onto the knitting needle and pull working yarn to adjust the tension.



For Practice

Make a bunch of slip knots, over and over and over!

The Long-Tail Cast-On

1. Leaving a long tail (about 2½" to 3" for each stitch to be cast on), make a slipknot and place on right needle.
2. Place thumb and index finger of left hand between yarn ends so that working yarn is around index finger and tail end is around thumb.
3. With your other fingers, secure the ends a few inches below the needles. Hold palm upwards, making a V of yarn (**Figure 1**).
4. Bring needle up through loop on thumb (**Figure 2**), grab first strand around index finger with needle, and go back down through loop on thumb (**Figure 3**).
5. Drop loop off thumb and, placing thumb back in V configuration, gently tighten resulting stitch on needle (**Figure 4**).

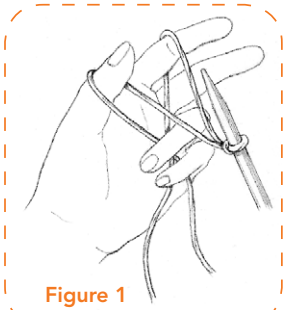
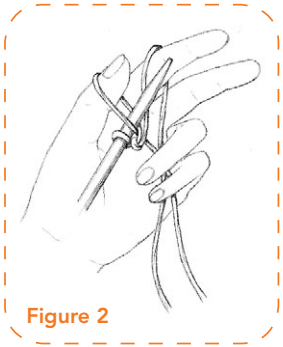


Figure 1



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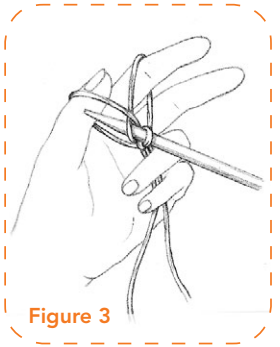

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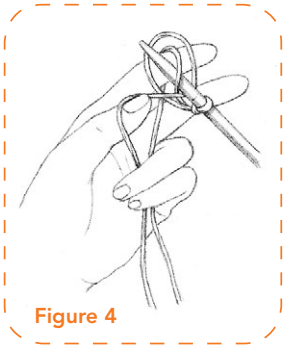

Figure 4

Be sure not to cast-on too tightly or loosely—stitches should easily slide back and forth on the needle without looking loose and "loopy."

For Practice

Cast on 20 stitches. Now pull all of the stitches off of the needle (I know, I know…) and cast on 20 stitches again. Repeat this process until you feel really comfortable with this cast-on. It takes awhile to get that muscle memory ingrained, so keep at it! It'll come, I promise.

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The Knit Stitch

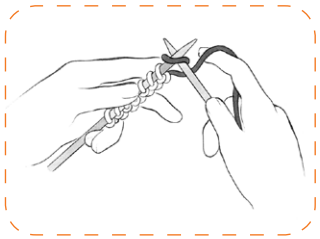
One of the objects of the knitting game is to move stitches from your left-hand needle to your right-hand needle, making new rows of stitches in the process.

Let's get started!

1. Cast on 20 stitches.
2. Hold the needle with the cast-on stitches in your left hand, the empty needle in your right hand. Hold the needles a few inches from the tips, between your thumb and first couple of fingers.
3. With the working yarn in back of the needle, insert the right needle into the front of the first stitch (the one closest to the tip) from left to right (**Figure 1**).
4. Now with your right index finger, bring the yarn between the needles from back to front. (**Figure 2**).
5. With your right hand, pull the right needle—which now has a loop of yarn around it—toward you and through the stitch (**Figure 3**).

You now have a stitch on the right needle. All you need to do to finish the stitch is to slip the old stitch off the left needle. Tug gently on the working yarn to secure the new stitch.

Repeat this process through the end of the row! When you have knitted every stitch on the row, you will have an empty needle in your left hand. Swap needles so that the "full" needle is in your left hand and the empty one is in your right hand, and do it all over again!



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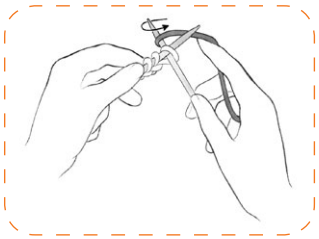

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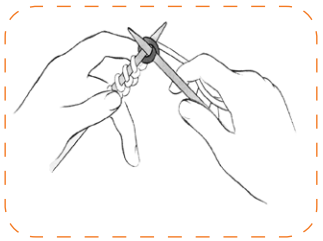


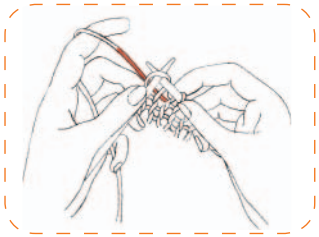
Figure 3

The Continental Method

There are several ways to accomplish the knit stitch; the two most popular are the English method (also called "throwing") and the Continental method (also called "picking"). The information at left pertains to the English method, in which the working yarn is held in the right hand. In the Continental method, the yarn is held in the left hand. Practice both methods to see which feels best to you. There's no right or wrong way to knit—well, I suppose there is a right way: whichever works best for you!

To use the Continental method of knitting, follow the steps below.

1. With the working yarn under and in the back of the needle, place the tip of your right needle between the front and back legs of the first stitch on the left needle (**Figure 1**). The tip of the needle should point away from you.
2. Wrap the yarn counterclockwise around the right needle (the one you just put through the stitch (**Figure 2**).
3. Pull the right needle back just enough to slip underneath the left needle and pull the yarn along with it, through the stitch on the left needle (**Figure 3**).



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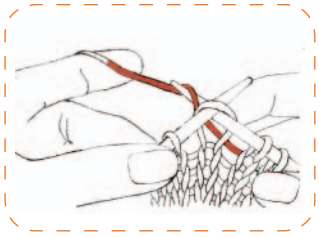

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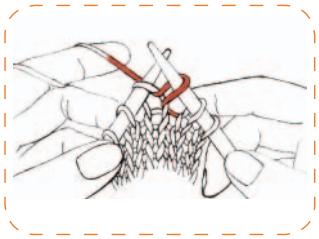

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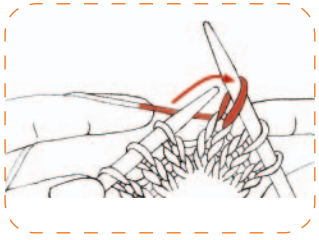


Figure 4

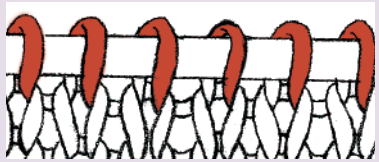
4. Slip the stitch off the left needle (**Figure 4**). You just created a new stitch!

For Practice

Make a practice swatch—just keep knitting rows! If you make a mistake, keep going. You aren't making anything but practice knitting, so you can ignore mistakes if you want to. If you want to correct them, though, please see the OOPS tion on page 6.

Right-Leg Rule

Every stitch has a front and a back leg. Each stitch should sit on the needle with its right leg in front of the needle. Think "right leg forward." If you knit a stitch with its left leg perched in front of the needle, the stitch will be twisted.



Right Leg Forward

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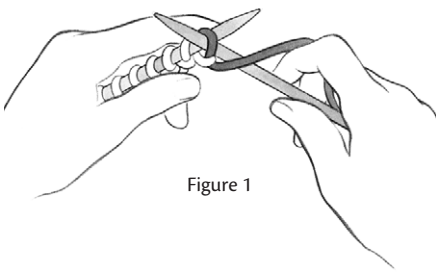
The Purl Stitch



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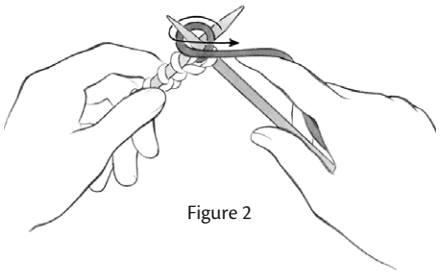

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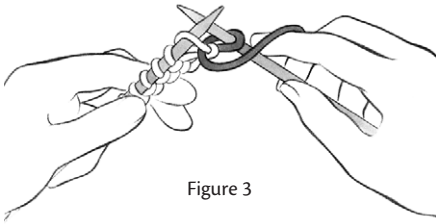


Figure 3

Step 1: As with the knit stitch, start by holding the needle with the stitches in your left hand and the empty needle in your right.

Step 2: Pull the working yarn in front of the needles. Insert the tip of the right needle into the front of the first stitch on the left needle, from right to left (Figure 1).

Step 3: With the yarn in front of the needles, travel around the tip of right needle in a counterclockwise movement, passing between the needles from right to left and back around to the front again (Figure 2).

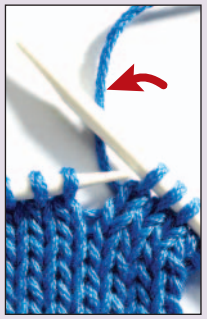
Step 4: Pull the right needle, with the loop of working yarn around it, down and back (moving away from you) through the stitch on the left needle (Figure 3). Slip the old stitch off the left needle and tighten the new stitch on the right needle. You have your first purl stitch.

Repeat this process through the end of the row. When you have purled every stitch on the row, you will have an empty needle in your left hand. Swap needles so that the "full" needle is in your left hand and the empty one in your right, and you're ready to begin the next row.

Note: If you purl every row, you also get garter stitch!

Identifying the Working Yarn

The working yarn, the yarn that runs from your needle to the ball, is attached to the last stitch you made. That last stitch worked should be the stitch closes to the tip of your right needle. "Inevitably, you'll get interrupted while knitting. When you return to your knitting, simply find the working yarn, make sure you're holding the needle with the last stitch worked in your right hand, and away you go."

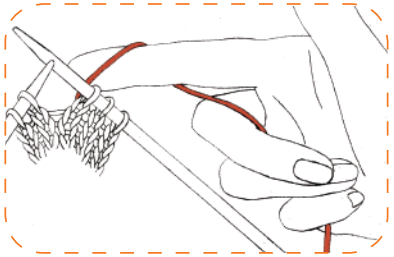


Working yarn

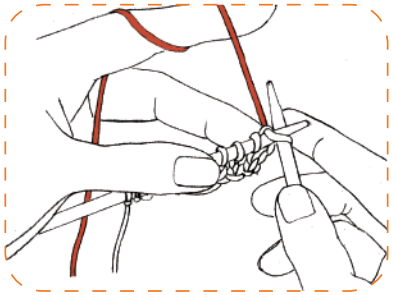
Tension

"Tensioning" yarn simply refers to how you hold your working yarn. You want to find a way to hold your yarn so that your stitches come out firm, but not too firm to slide easily along the needle, and look even (no particularly loose stitches and no particularly tight stitches). Figures 1 and 2 show just two ways to hold the yarn; Figure 1 shows tension for the English style of knitting and Figure 2 shows tension for the Continental style.

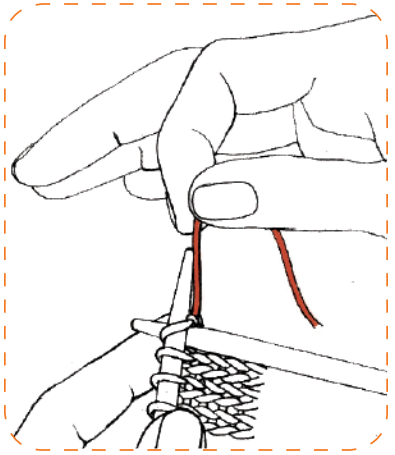
When you tension yarn, you're doing two things at once—slowing yarn as it comes off the ball and guiding yarn around the needle. Sounds complicated, but it's not. Why? Because there's no wrong way to do it. Once your hand acquires muscle memory of holding tension, you'll do it without thinking.



One way to tension yarn for the English method (Figure 1).



One way to tension yarn for the Continental method (Figure 2).



What doesn't work: Holding the yarn between your your thumb and forefinger to tension and guide the yarn at the same time. The trouble is that it provides irregular tension because you drop the yarn at each stitch.

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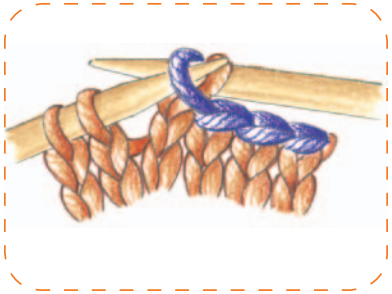
Binding Off (also called Casting Off)

Binding off secures the last row of the knitting so that it will not unravel.

First knit two stitches, then * with the two stitches on the right needle, pass the right stitch over the left and off the end of the needle. Knit the next stitch. Repeat from * until the all stitches have been bound off. After you bind off the last stitch on the needle, cut the working yarn and pull the cut yarn through the last stitch to secure it.

For Practice

Bind off the stitches on your practice swatch.

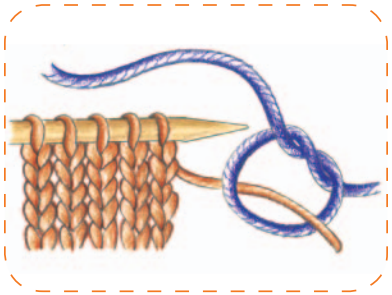


Joining New Yarn

What do you do when you've knit your way through an entire ball of yarn? It's time to join a new ball. There are several ways to do this, but here's the join I use.

Tie a new ball onto the old ball at the side edge using the first half of a square knot. Then slide the half-knot up to just behind the stitch on the needle and continue knitting with the new ball of yarn. This method has the advantage of uninterrupted knitted rows and feels quite stable where the new ball begins.

I recommend always joining your new yarn at the beginning of a row so you don't have a visible join in the middle of your row.



OOPS! Fixing Common Mistakes

Binding off secures the last row of knitting so that it will not unravel.

Unknitting: Unraveling Stitch by Stitch

This technique is also known as "tinking," ("tink" is "knit" spelled backward). Unknitting moves stitches in reverse, undoing each new stitch from the right needle and replacing the old stitch on the left. If you're at the end of a row, leave the full right needle in your right hand, exactly the opposite of what you'd do normally. If you're in the middle of a row, find your working yarn (the end that's coming from your ball of yarn) and hold the needle it's attached to in your right hand. The working yarn comes off the back of the knit stitches.

1. The trick to unknitting is to place the left needle tip into the stitch lying right underneath the live stitch next to the tip of your right needle. To do this, pull on the working yarn; the opening created in your stitches points to exactly where to place your left needle.
2. Place your left needle in the opening from front to back (**Figures 1 and 2**). This captures the stitch from the previous row without twisting it.
3. Slip this stitch from right needle to left needle. Pull the working yarn to unravel the stitch. The old stitch now sits on the left needle—one stitch has been unknitted (**Figures 3 and 4**).
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 until you arrive at the mistake.

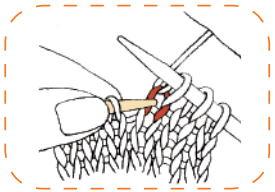


Figure 1

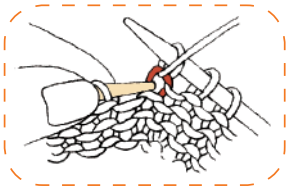


Figure 2

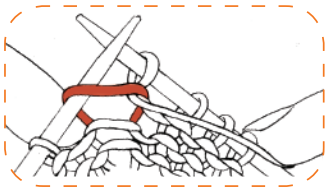


Figure 3

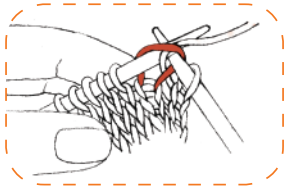


Figure 4

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OOPS! Fixing Common Mistakes

Avoiding Extra Stitches

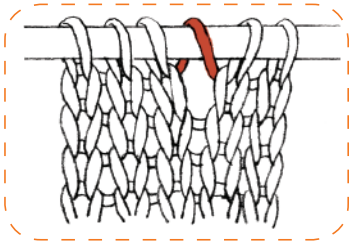

Figure 1

When you're beginning to knit, it's a good idea to count your stitches at the end of each row. If you end a row with more stitches than you began with, you've probably added some extra stitches. Look for slanted stitches on your needle (**See Figure 1**). If you see any, you may have accidentally made what's called a "yarnover".

This happens when you accidentally place the working yarn in the front when making a knit stitch, taking the working yarn over the right needle so that the loop on the needle looks like a stitch.

To fix the accidental yarnover, unknit to the slanted yarnover—there's your working yarn, on the incorrect side of the work. The yarnover will fall off the needle. Move the working yarn to the back and then finish your row without the extra stitch!

Accidentally Working the First Stitch as Two Stitches

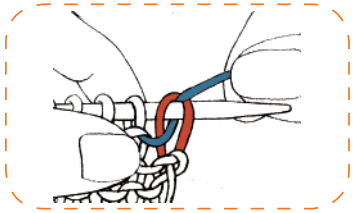

Figure 1

This common problem is a variation of the accidental yarnover: the working yarn is thrown over the needle at the end of the row, front to back, instead of under the needle. That pulls the first stitch up so that it looks like two stitches (**Figure 1**).

To fix this mistake, simply unknit to the double stitch and remove it.

Your First Projects

Project 1: Garter Stitch Scarf

This scarf is both good practice for beginning knitters and a stylish accessory!
Finished Size: 5" wide and 44" long
Yarn: CYCA #6, super chunky. Yarn Shown is Misti Alpaca Super Chunky Handpaint (50% cotton, 50% wool, 55yd [50 m]/100 g) SCH04, Oberon, 2 skeins.
Needles: Size 11 US
Gauge: 10 stitches and 18 rows in garter stitch (knit every row) equals 4 inches square
Skill Level: Easy

Scarf

Cast on 12 stitches.
Row 1: Knit.
Repeat Row 1 until you have 24 inches of yarn left.
Bind off all stitches and sew in ends.
Wear with pride!

Project 2: Garter Stitch Dishcloth

You'll love knitting these dishcloths for yourself and for gifts. This is a fun project for practicing increasing and decreasing stitches.
Finished Size: 9½ inches square
Yarn: CYCA #3, worsted. Yarn Shown is Lily Sugar'n Cream Solid (100 % cotton 120 yd [110 m]/70 g) 01222, Country Green
Needles: Size 7 US
Gauge: 16 to 18 stitches = 4 inches
Skill Level: Easy

Stitch Guide

Yarn Over
Bring working yarn to the front and wrap around the needle from front to back.

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Your First Projects

Knit Two Together

Insert the right needle into two stitches (at the same time) and knit them as if they were a single stitch.

Dishcloth

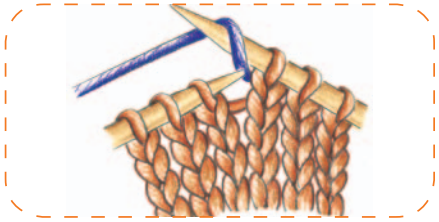
Cast on 4 stitches.

Row 1: Knit 4.

Row 2: Knit 2, yarnover, knit across the row. Repeat Row 2 until you have 44 stitches on the needle.

Row 3: Knit 1, Knit 2 together, yarnover, knit 2 together, knit to the end of the row. Repeat Row 3 until you have 4 stitches on the needle.

Bind off all stitches.



Yarnover increase

Knit two together decrease

Project 3: Ribbed Scarf

This scarf is great for practicing knitting and purling, and the finished product is a wonderful unisex gift.

Finished Size: 6 inches wide × 108 inches long

Yarn: CYCA #5, chunky. Yarn Shown is Bonbori (94% wool, 6% nylon, 88 yds [80 m]/50 g) Color 5, 3 balls.

Needles: Size 10 US

Gauge: 20 stitches = 4 inches in K1, P1 rib pattern

Skill Level: Easy

Scarf

Cast on 30 stitches.

Row 1: Knit 2, purl 2 across row.

Row 2: Purl 2, knit 2 across row.

Repeat Rows 1 and 2 until you have 24 inches of yarn left.

Bind off all stitches and sew in ends.

Tip: After completing Row 1, simply knit the knit stitches as you come to them and purl the purl stitches as you come to them. Easy!

Recommended Reading

Many of the instructions in this eBook were taken from the Interweave publications *Knit Fix* by Lisa Kartus and *The Knitter's Companion* by Vicki Square, and the special issue of *Knitscene, Knitscene Easy*. These are wonderful resources to have in your library!

Some other sources you might want to check out are:

Fearless Knitting Workbook by Jennifer Seiffert

The Knit Stitch by Sally Melville

The Knitter's Companion by Vicki Square

Stitch and Bitch by Debbie Stoller

Vogue Knitting: The Ultimate Knitting Book by the Editors of Vogue Knitting magazine

And if you're a visual learner, try www.YouTube.com. Enter "Interweave" in the search box and you'll get lots of informative how-to videos. You can also enter in the specific term you're looking for and chances are you'll get many videos to choose from.

For even more instruction, watch *Knitting Daily TV* on your local PBS station, or order the DVDs from www.Interweavestore.com.

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Books:

Knit Fix: Problem Solving for Knitters by Lisa Kartus, Interweave 2006
The Knitter's Companion, Expanded and Updated by Vicki Square, Interweave 2006

Magazines:

Knitscene Easy, Interweave 2010

knittingdaily

HOW TO KNIT FOR BEGINNERS: EASY KNITTING INSTRUCTIONS TO HELP YOU LEARN TO KNIT THE KNIT STITCH

A Knitting Daily eBook edited by
Kathleen Cubley

CREATIVE SERVICES
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